
THE
LIBRARY ASSISTANT

The Official Journal
of the Association of
Assistant Librarians

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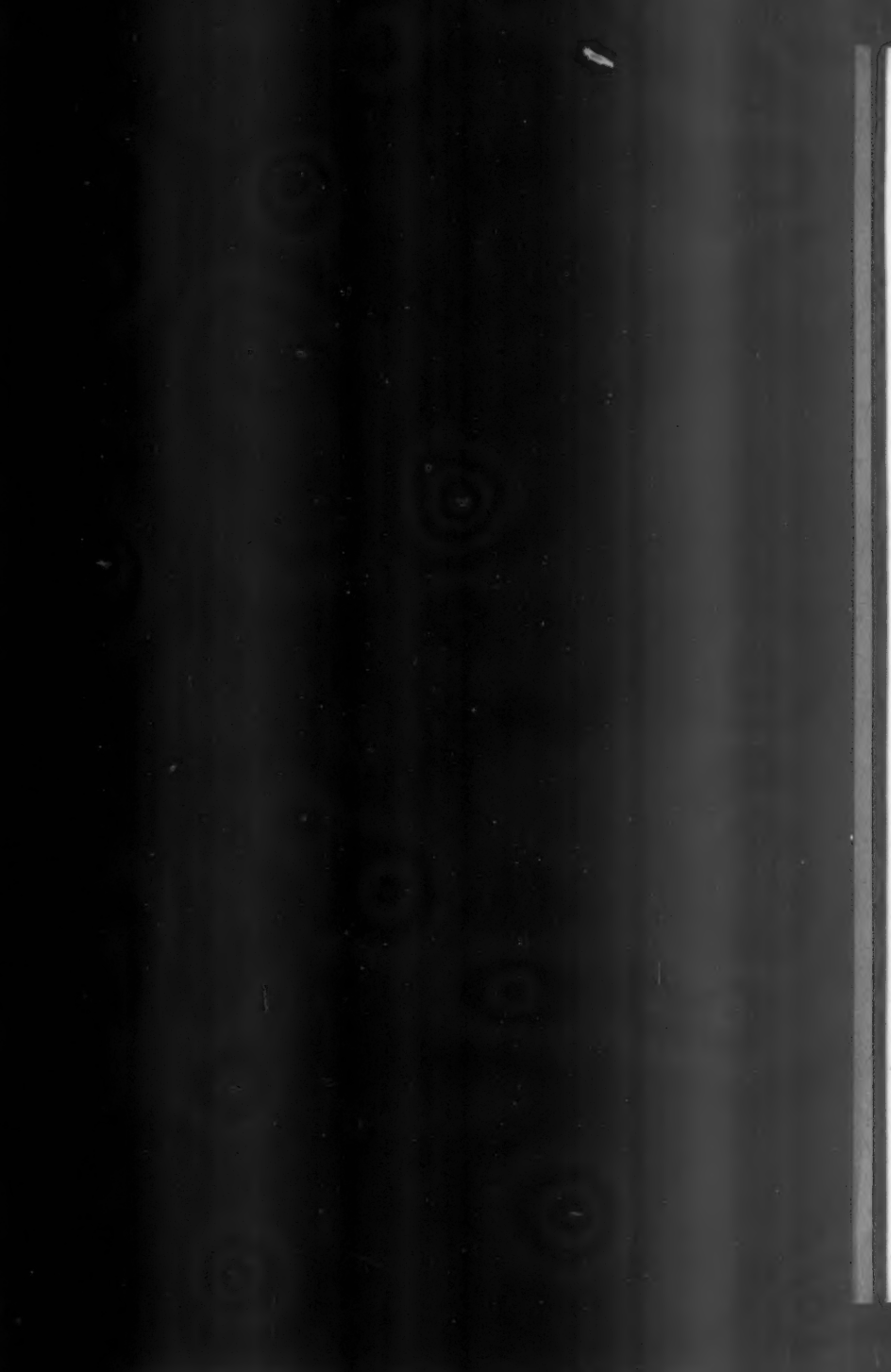
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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(*Section of the Library Association*)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON

Hornsey Public Libraries

The Crisis in Cataloguing¹

Andrew D. Osborn

¹ Continued from the May issue.

GENERALIZING, and passing over many minor matters, a pragmatic approach to cataloguing and to the catalogue code would result in the following developments:

1. All cataloguing practices would be meaningful, so that libraries where certain factors were present or absent would know whether they needed to adopt a given practice. For example, hanging indentation would not be prescribed unless it was clearly understood for what use hanging indentation is intended. It would be the function of the catalogue code to make known such reasons or lack of reasons, so that libraries could determine whether to follow the particular rule or not.

2. Three distinct and approved grades of cataloguing would be followed in the code and in many libraries. These would be standard, simplified, and detailed cataloguing. The classes of books which would be treated according to these methods should be specified. Standard cataloguing would be less detailed in many respects than the 1908 code or the Library of Congress formerly required.

3. In addition, self-cataloguing methods must be put in good standing and exploited. This would apply in some measure to city directories, college catalogues, documents, large duplicate sets on open shelves, pamphlets and other ephemeral material arranged by subject, special collections of recreational reading, telephone books, and items in vertical files. Some or all of these practices are being used in one way or another; their use should increase.

4. Rules for cataloguing would be relatively few and simple, partly because they would not attempt to cover exceptional and unusual cases. Revisions of the catalogue code would thereafter result in slight change, so that whole classes of material would not have to be re-catalogued.

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5. The quality of the work would be high for anything regarded as essential. Non-essentials would be given little attention or passed over.

6. Cataloguers would be trained to use their judgment, not to expect a rule or a precedent to guide them at all turns. It is hard to do intelligent work if that work has to be all by rule of thumb. If cataloguers are called on to use judgment, the work will again become more interesting.

7. Unwritten rules and practices would be subject to the same pragmatic security. Some cataloguers, for example, think that the sequence of subject headings in the tracing should follow certain requirements. Attention to such a detail is completely valueless except where printed or mimeographed cards are concerned, and even there its value is doubtful.

8. The interpretation of any point will follow practical lines. If certain illustrations were intentionally included in a book as portraits, whether they are caricatures, representations on coins, or effigies on tombs, they can be recorded in the collation as portraits. This is the natural thing to do. Much artificiality has resulted from ignoring natural and obvious methods of procedure.

9. The cataloguing of serial documents and non-documents should be reviewed to see to what extent this class of material needs cataloguing. Should superior indexes be provided instead for Government publications? Should the *Union list of serials* serve as the catalogue for such serials as it covers?

Organization of the Catalogue Department.—Cataloguers and library administrators are thus faced with many and difficult cataloguing problems of a technical nature. Organizational questions are equally pressing, however. Far too little attention has been given in library literature to the organization of catalogue departments, while in actual practice physical conditions have controlled matters to an undesirable extent.

Large or small divisions and sections are followed in some libraries. In others small groups of cataloguers are under the control of revisers. Again the work may be done by units consisting of an experienced and a junior cataloguer. Some cataloguers do their own typing, ordering Library of Congress cards, or filing, while in other libraries special people are set aside to do such work. Some libraries are organized to catalogue for others, as is the case with school libraries in Chicago and Los Angeles or with departmental and branch libraries. These are some of the many organizational patterns in use to-day.

Many catalogue departments pay too little attention to the flow of material and hence tend to be organized less advantageously. The catalogue department of any size will have to be streamlined in the future. Material that can move rapidly should be segregated from other books that

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move at an average or at a slow rate. Fiction, second copies, other editions, books to be stored directly in deposit libraries—these and others can be treated with considerable rapidity. Rare books and difficult cataloguing of one kind or another may move very slowly. If the various types go along together, there are two dangers. One is that the slower books will obstruct the general flow, and the other is that if a cataloguer pays special attention to getting the faster books along the others may be slighted either through setting them aside to be done when time permits or through treating them in the same way that an easy book might be treated.

Many popular libraries have for years streamlined their cataloguing departments. It is not difficult to do if the types of cataloguing are easily determinable, as, for instance, if second copies in considerable number keep coming into the catalogue department as intentionally purchased duplicates. It is in the larger catalogue departments where there may be many gifts and exchanges as well as purchased books that streamlining has been slow in developing. This may be partly due to the fact that such a department would need more central administration to take care of the decisions involved and to direct the flow of work.

It has commonly been stated that the three essential departments of a library are reference, circulation, and cataloguing. In some school, branch, and departmental libraries the catalogue department has been eliminated. More catalogue departments ought to disappear in the near future. Cataloguing can and should be supplied as a service in many libraries. It is possible that the development of regional deposit libraries will provide the means and the accommodation for regional cataloguing centres. Neighbouring libraries of a common type can at least share the work or concentrate it in one particular place.

This question is related to the further one regarding the future of official catalogues. Large libraries are finding official catalogues an increasing burden. It may cost the very large library ten thousand dollars a year to maintain such a catalogue. If the building were designed so that all users of the library were conveniently brought together, then an official catalogue would be unnecessary, provided the pressure on the public catalogue were not too great. Money is better expended on service than on duplicating records. If library buildings can be designed so that an official catalogue becomes unnecessary, the organization of a catalogue department will be a simpler thing to control. As official catalogues have grown it has become increasingly hard to operate catalogue departments efficiently. A layout that was close to ideal in the beginning may in the course of time result in situations far from ideal, owing to the growth of the official catalogue as well as of the staff and its duties.

Mention of service, which is a basic factor in library work, brings up

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the need for considering the concentration of trained librarians who are working behind the scenes in catalogue departments, while at the same time students assistants, untrained help, or insufficient professional help may be working with the readers. This is a major problem of organization, namely, how to make that concentration of trained people more generally useful throughout the library.

Classification.—The many problems confronting cataloguers and library administrators are not confined to cataloguing proper; they are both significant and numerous in the field of classification. The complicating factor in classification is that the theoretical literature on the subject is in a state of confusion. This is in no small measure due to the emphasis that certain writers place on the classification of knowledge and on bibliographic classification. German philosophers and scientists delighted in drawing up schemes for the classification of knowledge all through the nineteenth century. Such schemes had some slight value but were too much on the order of intellectual pastimes. As a practical matter library classification is far removed from any such schemes.

Bibliographic classification has been worked out and successfully applied in such an undertaking as the enormous card bibliography developed by the Brussels Institute for Documentation. Miss Mann successfully applied bibliographic classification in the classified catalogue at the Engineering Societies Library in New York. On the books, however, she used relatively simple Dewey numbers. This example of the Engineering Societies Library shows clearly the difference between the two types of classification. Bibliographic classification is unsuited to the classification of books in workaday libraries; that classification must be governed by practical requirements.

In its application classification calls for a high degree of good judgment. Classification can be a game. It is good fun to build up long numbers, to put books in precise but out-of-the-way classes, to debate academic niceties. Such classification hurts a library. The classifier with good judgment will not waste time arguing which alternative is the better; the case will be decided pragmatically, according to the wording of the title, for example. There must be the realization that some books have one precise class, while fully as many again could go equally well in one of a number of places.

Reclassification raises problems of two kinds. The daily question of reclassifying an odd book or two is one, while the reclassification of a whole library is another. As regards the former, it requires constant administrative pressure to prevent much reclassification. Re-location is, of course, a separate matter, as the re-location of a book from the reference room to the stacks. Much reclassification is purely academic in nature.

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A cataloguer or a professor thinks that a book would be better in some other class. This kind of reclassification must be resisted as much as possible, and all the more so if the book concerned shows every evidence of not having been used in many a year.

Decisions to reclassify a whole library should be arrived at only after clearly realizing that the old classification scheme was ineffective to a high degree. Many libraries are using poor classification schemes, usually home-made ones. As long as those schemes work there is no real reason why they should be given up. Classification schemes age very rapidly. Both Dewey and the Library of Congress schemes have suffered the ravages of time. That situation will be aggravated with the further passage of time. Total reclassification of a library is terribly expensive. Partial reclassification may be a desired compromise. Less-used books may be left according to the old scheme, so that the new classification will represent a live collection of books; or some main classes which are unsatisfactory can be changed, leaving unchanged those that were satisfactory.

Suitability of a particular scheme to the type of library is a matter of importance. Modification of a standard scheme may be a solution. At the least, great caution is necessary before reclassifying a whole library. Some libraries have made serious mistakes by adopting the Library of Congress classification; it is not true that it is necessarily the best scheme for a college library. Perhaps the situation as regards classification and reclassification can be summarized by saying that the golden age of classification is over.

Subject Heading.—If it is necessary to say that the literature on classification is in a state of confusion, it is equally necessary to say that the literature on subject heading is almost non-existent. At most, it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that Cutter's *Rules for a dictionary catalogue*, the fourth and final edition of which appeared in 1904, provides the latest word on the theory and practice of subject heading. Cutter's work was that of the pioneer. He saw a new day dawning with the printing of Library of Congress cards, but neither he nor anyone else has been a guide through this era of printed cards.

Even the best of cataloguing instructors admit they do not know how to teach subject heading properly. The theory, practice, and needs are all ill-defined. For such reasons it is better to say less rather than more about subject headings here.

In part the trouble springs from the use of words, since words can be local, obsolescent, or technical, or they can stand for vague, ambiguous or emergent concepts, or they can even be lacking for some ideas or relations of ideas. In part the trouble comes from trying to make a science of

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subject heading when it is necessarily an art. Some subject heading has no other dignity than the mere expression of opinion; much of it has to be based on judgment, in which experience counts greatly; some has to be precise. In part the trouble comes from differentiating insufficiently between the needs of different types of libraries. Here the compelling dictionary-catalogue idea has been a handicap.

The principle of the dictionary catalogue is to provide a record that will make for a maximum of self-help on the part of readers. This means that the catalogue must be adapted to the needs of varying institutions. It also means that the maximum of self-help can be obtained only as long as the catalogue does not become too complex. Many dictionary catalogues are becoming too complex and are accordingly defeating the ends for which they were created. That is why there are signs of the decline of the dictionary catalogue, as would be indicated by the possibly unfortunate trend towards a divided author and subject catalogue and by the search for substitutes for the dictionary catalogue.

What the Library Administrator needs to Know.—These, then, are the things the library administrator needs to know about cataloguing and these are the pressing problems which confront cataloguer and administrator alike. It is not that the library administrator needs to be a technician, though some knowledge of cataloguing technique is desirable. It is rather that he must know the nature of present-day cataloguing problems if he would be in a position to help in their solution and to supply a certain amount of leadership and direction.

A crisis has been reached in cataloguing history. The system that shaped up about the year 1900 showed ominous signs of falling apart in 1940. In the Library of Congress the system actually broke down, and what happens in that library as far as cataloguing is concerned affects libraries throughout the country while the Library of Congress holds the key position that it does.

Excellent work was done between 1900 and 1940. Praise and appreciation can properly be expressed for the accomplishments of these four decades. Perhaps at the same time there is a certain satisfaction in realizing that the giants of those days did not solve all the problems, leaving little if anything for their successors to accomplish. This problem field known as cataloguing is still a challenge to clear thinking and sound judgment.

The foremost problem confronting library administrators has been set down as the cost of cataloguing. Elements contributing to that problem are questions as to what theory of cataloguing to follow, how to work out a satisfactory cataloguing code, how best to organize a catalogue department, what classification scheme should be used, and how it should

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be applied. These and many other questions of greater or less significance are what the library administrator must know about and be prepared to tackle in collaboration with cataloguers.

Cataloguing policies and practices are about to be set for another generation. Whether the people of the 1980's will say librarians and cataloguers of to-day had as much understanding and ability as can now be attested for the people of the early 1900's depends on the success of the deliberations of the 1940's.

It is important to say that the awareness of these problems is not to be taken as one generation criticizing another. I have catalogued through twenty of the forty years that made up the era which I believe has now come to an end. In 1920 there was enough remaining of the original inspiration to make itself felt and appreciated. Nevertheless, there were clear signs that the picture was rapidly changing. Pressure of work was in no small measure responsible, resulting as it inevitably did in systematization and standardization to an unwelcome degree.

Those of us who see ourselves bridging the two eras have an added responsibility. We know and respect what was good in the past. We honour the traditions in which to greater or less extent we participated. And for such reasons our leadership in charting new courses should and can be so much the wiser.



Children's Libraries in the U.S.S.R.

Beatrice King

A REPORT of a talk given on 8th February to the Association of Children's Librarians by Mrs. Beatrice King of the Society for Cultural Relations with the U.S.S.R.

Replies given by Mrs. King to the questions asked in the discussion have been incorporated in the report.

Under the Soviet régime, children's libraries are an integral part of the system of education. It is not necessary, therefore, to plead their cause as in England, for it is recognized by the authorities that there can be no progress without books.

In 1917, when the Revolution overthrew the Tsarist social order, 68 per cent. of the inhabitants of the Russian empire were registered illiterate, even though the only standard of knowledge required of the

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literate was the ability to sign one's name. In the Asiatic part of the empire, the percentage of illiteracy rose as high as 90 per cent. The authorities were thus faced with the stupendous task of educating 160 million people, and this in a country torn by civil war!

But Lenin and his colleagues had a clear-cut conception of the goal they wished to reach. From the beginning the aim must be a nation of highly trained and educated men and women who would spend all their energies in increasing their knowledge for the good of the community. The fundamental tool in this plan was the book. Train the future citizens to love books and to know them, and half the battle would be won. Hence the importance of children's libraries.

Children's libraries are only part of the great plan of the Soviet, and have therefore developed only as the plan developed. Meanwhile the people have been taught to realize the necessity for these unaccustomed amenities of life and they have become eager for books and yet more books.

From the earliest days of his life, the Soviet child is made familiar with books. Even in the crèche, he will find a display of attractive picture books which he may handle. Every school has an adequate library, housed in a large room of its own. All teachers are expected to encourage reading, especially as a means of information. This applies not only to the literature teacher but to the teachers of history, geography, and science. Every school is attached to a factory,¹ and in the factory or farm club also there is a library for children's books.

In his leisure time also the child is constantly in contact with books. He finds libraries in the clubs and Pioneer Palaces, and there are two great schemes of propaganda utilized to popularize books and reading. The first of these is the Puppet Theatre which has as its hero the cosmopolitan Punch, a Punch without a hump but with all his accustomed quips and witticisms. He enacts the amusing story of what happens to people who cannot read, and this play is followed up by talks on books. Punch tours all over the Soviet Union giving his performances to children of 6-12 years and to the older folk too.

The second means of propaganda is the Museum of Children's Books which has its headquarters in Moscow. This is designed to encourage reading and the care of books and bears the unusual and attractive slogan, "You may touch and handle everything in this museum." By means of exhibits in the guise of games, children are taught the complete history of a book and told something of their authors. In another room the interested child can try his hand on processes of illustration, a practice which has resulted in the discovery of much unexpected talent. This

¹ Or collective farm.

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museum can be packed into a small space and can easily be sent into the remote areas of the sixteen Soviet Republics which make up the U.S.S.R.

Every adult library has a children's section which is in the charge of a trained librarian. The children help in the selection of the books, and when a borrower returns a book the librarian discusses it with him to find out whether he has understood what he has read. The children's librarian must be able to recommend books on any subject in the child's school curriculum.

The training of a children's librarian is thorough, for she (librarians are usually women) has to take a detailed course lasting five years. The syllabus covers world history and literature, politics, and a language, as well as the technical subjects. When the librarian has a post—and the demand for librarians far exceeds the supply—she is expected to take a "refresher" course and to attend Conferences each year. At these Conferences librarians meet illustrators and authors and discuss the problems of children's literature.

There is an enormous output of books for children in the U.S.S.R. Originally the State selected and published all children's books, but after a time this task was handed over to the League of Young Communists, a body of young people between 14 and 25 years of age. The first result of this step was the publication of collections of folk tales from all countries. There is of necessity a censorship of the books written for children, for even art must be used as a means to an end, but Soviet books cover a great variety of thoughts and ideas. The illustrations and format of books for children are exceptionally good.

Translations of Kipling's books, Dickens, and Robin Hood are popular, and there is a regular stream of the new Soviet literature. This was at first crude propaganda, but now the ulterior motive is well hidden by the artistry of these attractive books. After all, are not all books propaganda for someone's opinions? There is no need to invent heroes for adventure tales, for the Soviet has many heroes—explorers, scientists, airmen—and it is one of the few countries in which there are mountains still unscaled and lands still unexplored. Imaginative literature is not denied to children, however, and much good poetry is written for them, a sense of rhythm being developed from an early age.

Soviet authors realize the great influence of books on children. A recent popular series of tales about a boy Timur and his friends has resulted in the Timur gangs. Their members, with a show of mystery and secrecy, do good deeds for those in trouble. Books also encourage interest and pride in military exploits.

There is a Children's Theatre in most towns, with a trained company and an orchestra. The children can have a say in what is produced and

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attend the final rehearsal to criticize. A similar system exists in cinemas for no child is allowed to attend an adult cinema.

To conclude. In the Soviet Union, children's libraries have not to compete with worthless films and radio programmes, for the worthless use of leisure does not exist. From observation it seems that, given the right environment, all children enjoy reading books, and that their instinctive preference is for the better books.



The County Scene

Mary Piggott

IT is good to see so many book lists of such excellent quality in spite of decreased staff and restricted paper supplies. The most attractive lists come from Derby county and are very useful little guides to those pursuits which many people now are taking up for the first time in their lives. The titles include *Toy making*, *Herbs and herb gardening*, *Wartime cookery*, *Bee keeping*, and *Goats, pigs, and rabbits*. The delightful pictures on the front, reproduced by permission of the publishers from book illustrations, are sufficient enticement to even the least enthusiastic reader to take a chance with some of the titles inside. These folders are in addition to the *County library book list* which now appears at irregular intervals instead of quarterly (the two last issues being for September 1941 and January 1942) and lists a good selection of popular books, with admirably worded notes on each book of which the title is not self-explanatory. From Derby comes also a neatly printed booklet listing works on Soviet Russia, rightly, I think, devoting most space to books dealing with the conditions of everyday life, on which, of course, the ordinary man in this country will base his judgment of the Russian experiment. Under the heading *Personalities*, *The Case of Leon Trotsky* follows *Stalin's Kampf* with nice impartiality.

Devon county publishes monthly lists on topical subjects the one I have, on America, being up to date and well chosen, except that for a popular list I think it would have been better under the heading of *Literature* to have suggested actual prose authors and titles instead of giving the two books of literary history and criticism. Two comprehensive anthologies of poetry are included.

During the last year Kent has issued four quarterly lists in black and white covers, illustrated with charming blocks appropriate to the Kentish

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seasons. The September one of east-houses is particularly pleasing. The selection of books is good, but the few annotations, limited in number doubtless of necessity, though brief are not always precise. "A story of England in wartime," appended to Margery Allingham's *The Oaken heart*, might equally well apply to a score of other books and bring no less enlightenment.

Lancashire continues to issue the monthly list *New books*, which since the war began has replaced the two selections, *Knowledge in the Making* and *For lighter moments*. *New books* is a guide for the expert and technician rather than the aspiring amateur and might usefully be supplemented with topical lists such as those produced by Derby. Normally, such lists may well be compiled and duplicated by the Branch Librarians, but now that such activities are disallowed, it ought to be possible occasionally to indicate to the humbler reader that his needs are not forgotten. Few borrowers at village centres, so far as I know, requisition books from these monthly lists.

There is much to be said, I think, in favour of adhering, as Lancashire does, to the Dewey classification in book lists. The particular reader knows where his subject invariably comes; the general reader is not more confused than by an arbitrarily chosen sequence of subject headings. Kent, for example, in the spring list, heads page one with *Adventure and travel* and it is only on page fourteen that the armchair traveller finds *Sea adventures*; similarly, in the same issue, thirteen unrelated topics come between *The Church* and *Religion*. In the absence of cross-references it would be easy for the simple to lose their way among this plethora of alphabetic signposts.

I am grateful to Mr. C. B. Freeman, though not in entire agreement with him, for a letter referring to my last article on the provision of reference books at branch libraries. He writes: "Current tendencies are rapidly leading us to the point where the term 'branch library' will call up visions of sun-trap windows, gaily coloured book-jackets, and girls in flowered overalls—and nothing else. [Saving coupons?] Now, excellent as these things may be, they will not go far in maintaining the claim of the public library to be the cultural centre and intellectual power-house of the community. These functions should find expression not only in the Central Library, but (in a lesser degree) at every branch in the system—above all in a county system, where the majority of readers never visit Headquarters. One factor conducive to this end is the provision of a reference collection in every branch library without exception, and where there is not a more adequate reference library available within (say) three miles (as is the case with most county branches), I do not see how any librarian can let his committee rest until the collection is numbered in

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four figures. But however small the collection is, there should either be a separate room for it, or a room available where a reader can take a volume of the *Britannica* and read it without hearing the distracting noises of feet and voices; a room, moreover, where those who are studying at home can bring their own books and escape from little-brother passion for radio jazz by the provision of a study room the humblest branch library will come a step nearer to ranking as the 'poor man's university.'"

Well (I'm sorry, I shall have to say it), it all depends on what you mean by a reference collection. Taking the general connotation of a collection of highly specialized books and works in encyclopædic or dictionary form, I don't see how a four-figure collection can be housed at a branch library, let alone paid for. Smaller branch libraries serving a population of under 10,000 seldom have shelf-space for more than 3,000 volumes altogether, and of the third of that population who may be expected to use the library, only a very few will demand highly technical books, and still fewer expect them to be produced on the spot. Incidentally, not many local library sub-committees have any jurisdiction over the allocation of the book fund, which is, perhaps, just as well.

Mr. Freeman urges that the public library service of this country should be regarded as a single system and complains, "It seems to be a point of honour, so far as I have observed, that when a county borrower living near the boundary of the county town makes a Bureau application, the book shall never be supplied to him from the municipal library of the county town (where he might collect it in person), but always if possible from some other library in the Region, so that the trouble and expense may be enjoyed at both ends." This apparent waywardness is not, I think, wanton. When the Bureau list of requisitioned books is circulated, any library with a required book immediately available signifies its willingness to lend, and a book posted from the other end of the Region is of more value to the reader than the copy in stock at the library half a mile away which has just gone out for a month.

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Current Books: Literature

EDMUND BLUNDEN. *Thomas Hardy*. Macmillan. 7s. 6d. (English Men of Letters.)

HARDY, the great Victorian, lived to be the greatest of the moderns. In this book his novels, his poetry, and his life are surveyed with sympathy and understanding. A little too much reverence is here, perhaps, and too little criticism, but the book will do much to establish Hardy in his real place in modern literature, and to remedy current neglect.

JOHN LEHMANN. *Penguin new writing No. 11*. D. KILHAM ROBERTS. *The Century's poetry*. Penguin Books, 6d. each.

These two anthologies continue the good work started in the previous volumes. Mr. Lehmann reprints stories of Chamson, Phelan, and Tikhonov, and gives us a further instalment of Fanfarlo's adventures in the Blitz, together with a good piece of reportage by an engine-driver. Kilham Roberts' anthology draws on the rich store of verse from Pope to Keats, and embodies in his 150 pages some of the finest of English poetry.

SEAN O'CASEY. *Pictures in the hallway*. McMillan. 12s. 6d.

The second instalment of O'Casey's autobiography shows Johnny in adolescence, his school-leaving, his first job at three and sixpence a week, his approach to manhood. Tender and brutal by turns, infused with a vein of fierce poetry, this is a most original and fascinating book.

MICHAEL ROBERTS. *Faber book of comic verse*. Faber. 8s. 6d.

Anthologies are many, but few are as entertaining as this, and Mr. Roberts once again proves himself an admirable editor. There are many old favourites here: Calverley, Lear, Barham, Graham, and so on; but a spice of the lesser known, and some admirable Americana has been added.

STEPHEN SPENDER. *Ruins and visions*. Faber. 6s.

These are Mr. Spender's first poems since *The Still centre*: in four sections "A Separation," "Ironies of war," "Deaths" and "Visions," he has recorded his reactions to personal and to international affairs, yet

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the synthesis is not complete. There are lines of extreme sensibility, but there are also crudities that one does not look for in one of Mr. Spender's stature. A declamatory style leads one to suspect a facility Spender has decried in some of his contemporaries.

"The answering inconsolable cry
Of lost humanity,"

finds a more promising voice in the last section of the book, which is less concerned with the expression of familiar situations, and more with the deeper realization of inarticulate humanity.

EDMUND WILSON. *The Wound and the bow*. Secker & Warburg. 15s.

Those who have read *Axel's castle* and *To the Finland station* will be eager to read this new volume of essays by the same author: they will not be disappointed, for this is a superb book. A masterly essay on Dickens, a brilliant explanation of the obscurities of *Finnegan's wake*, and an estimate of Hemingway make up three of the seven essays. They confirm us in the opinion that Wilson is one of the outstanding critics of our time.



Correspondence

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

In the interests of my committee I should like to correct any misunderstanding which may arise from your inclusion, in the April issue of THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT, of an extract from *The Hyde reporter*. This extract does not refer to the Hyde Public Libraries Committee, but to that of a neighbouring council.

Yours faithfully,

K. C. HARRISON,
Borough Librarian, Hyde.

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CENTRAL LIBRARY,
SHEFFIELD, 1.

30th March, 1942.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

NATIONAL SURVEY

SIR,—

Mr. Savage, with the clarity of mind and maturity of judgment we have learned to expect from him, has shown how much danger lies in the assumption, by the Emergency Committee of the Library Association, of responsibilities which properly belong to the library movement as a whole.

When the creation of an Emergency Committee was proposed at the time of intense enemy raids, I supported it on two conditions: (1) that it confined itself to carrying on the day-to-day work of the Association, and (2) that its members should represent the different sections of the movement. Actually, the Committee consists of the Chairmen of the normal Committees, plus the Officers, and it seemed natural to assume that its activities would be limited to routine administration. It is astonishing and disturbing to find that so unrepresentative a Committee, far from limiting itself to domestic affairs within its competence, has taken upon itself the considerable task of planning the future of librarianship.

If it were desirable to choose one librarian to undertake a job of some importance, I imagine that few would object to the selection of Mr. McColvin, whose abilities are considerable, and whose intellectual integrity and freedom from personal rancour are known and respected. But it is a grave disservice to Mr. McColvin to ask him to shoulder so difficult a task, which needs for its accomplishment the selfless and devoted efforts of all the best minds and the most experienced workers in librarianship.

One thing should now be clear to all of us. The world, after the war, will be very different from the one shattered by the impact of Hitlerism; few of the intellectual, social, or economic illusions cherished during twenty uneasy years are likely to survive. The times surely call for a most careful and objective examination of the place librarianship may be able to secure in the new world gradually taking shape before our eyes. We must examine in a new spirit our relations with the education services, with particular attention to the sweeping plans which the young and able men who have an influential voice in that vast and powerful organization are now maturing, and which will have a profound effect on our future if they are adopted; a new conception of democratic responsibility and its attendant implications must be in our minds; we should reconsider our attitude towards the book as an instrument for

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information, vocational training, enlightenment, and culture. All these problems, and many others of which space prevents mention, are dimly appearing in the shape of things to come. Can they be resolved by one man, however gifted, or a committee, however seriously it takes itself, elected for quite different purposes?

The sensible method surely is to create a really representative committee, composed of librarians of all types of libraries, selected for their integrity and flexibility of mind, ability, and experience. It should include laymen known to be interested in libraries, with first-hand knowledge of the trends of formal and adult education, and should be presided over by a non-librarian of national eminence. It would act in the manner of a Royal Commission—receive evidence, interview representatives of libraries, education authorities, organizations allied to libraries, etc. Its findings (which would, of course, be subject to the approval first of the Council, and later of the members) would have an authority unlikely to be accorded to the views of the official library body, whose inability to impress the Department concerned with our welfare (or, perhaps, in view of recent events, with our extinction!) has been clearly shown by the treatment of librarians in regard to military service.

Yours faithfully,

J. P. LAMB.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

In her letter, published in last month's *LIBRARY ASSISTANT*, Miss April O'Riordan suggests that women library assistants might make a greater contribution to the war effort by, say, joining one of the auxiliary services, than by remaining in their present positions. I feel, however, that, while stressing the æsthetic value of libraries, she has overlooked their utility value in time of war. Libraries are the chief, and, in some places, the only centres of information and true recreation. Home Guards, air-raid wardens, factory workers, and "diggers for victory"—all turn to the public library for help, and are often surprised at the amount of information available.

The efficiency of the library service would be very seriously impaired if a large number of young, partly trained female assistants were to take up other forms of national service. It would affect both the present and the future of libraries, and I feel very strongly that, unless we are forced to do otherwise, we should do all we can to maintain an efficient library service, and to become qualified, so that libraries may play their part in the winning of the peace.

MARY THOMAS.

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